

## **Message from the Chief**

**Chief's Memo – September 8, 2006**

### ***In the Line of Duty!***

This week's memo is dedicated to Battalion Chief Robert (Rob) Paul Stone and George (Sandy) Willett Jr. whose OV-10 air tactical aircraft crashed on Wednesday shortly after 10:30 am while on a mission east of Springville in the Mountain Home Demonstration State Forest in Tulare County. The crash claimed their lives.



This is a difficult time for family, friends, co-workers, and the entire fire service community. We all know that the work we do is dangerous. We all know that, as firefighters, tragedies can and do, too often, take the lives of our fellow firefighters. And that it may even take our own life someday. But yet, it is still unexpected and tragic when it occurs. It is at times like these that we pull together. It is at times like these that we stand side by side as a CDF family and support the family of our lost firefighters, and each other.

I recently visited with Rob's wife, Rindi, and her family, and Sandy's wife, Judy, and her family and expressed the condolences of all the men and women of CDF. I assured them that we will be with them today, tomorrow, and in the future. They are part of the CDF family forever.

Some things I can tell you about the professional side that is in common between Rob and Sandy is that they loved doing what they were doing. They were good at it. They loved the people with whom they worked. They were loved by the people that worked with them. And, they had a passion for firefighting, for flying, and for CDF.

I have always considered firefighters as heroes. The five year anniversary of Sept. 11 is approaching. That was a time when many people saw, for the first time, firefighters rushing into a dangerous fire situation to rescue others, while most other people were trying to escape. It was a very graphic display of the firefighting profession.

We all know that CDF air operations personnel regularly fly into the belly of a wildfire to protect lives, homes, property, and natural resources. We also know that many times they fly into that fire to protect firefighters on the ground that are battling wildfires and protecting lives and structures. When we hear that sound overhead and see the retardant being dropped we feel relief and comforted, and we know that we will be successful. Air operations personnel are the heroes' hero! Rob and Sandy were among the best of those heroes.

I know that the next few days and weeks ahead will be very difficult for all of you. There are no adequate words that can be said to comfort you. The grieving process is natural, and necessary, to cope with the reality of this tragic loss of our loved ones who gave their lives in the service of others and in the line of duty.

We will always remember...

CDF Battalion Chief Robert "Rob" Paul Stone, 36, was a resident of Visalia and an 18-year employee of CDF. He is survived by his wife, Mary Marinda "Rindi" Stone and two children Wil, age 8, and Libbie, age 4.

DynCorp Pilot George "Sandy" Willett, 52, was a resident of Hanford and a pilot for four years with DynCorp, which is based in Fort Worth, Texas, and contracts with California to provide pilots for firefighting. He is survived by his wife, Judy, of Hanford.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Grijalva". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter "R" being particularly large and stylized.

Ruben Grijalva, Chief  
Director / State Fire Marshal